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BOOK REVIEWS

A NOTEWORTHY INTERPRETATION OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE¹

In few fields has American scholarship distinguished itself more notably than in the psychological interpretation of religion. From the very beginning of such study down to the present, the psychologists of America have very generally manifested genuine insight, independence of viewpoint and method, and keenness of analysis combined with lucidity and aptness of description. These characteristics are conspicuous likewise in Professor Pratt's *The Religious Consciousness*. Because of them the book will be of interest, as well as of instruction, to the general reader no less than to the technical student of religion.

Professor Pratt approached his task with an exceptional equipment: with a philosophical training, and hence the cultivation of reflective, self-critical thought, of broad perspective, and of the courage to face problems in all their baffling complexity; with extensive psychological knowledge, and long practice in applying this to religious problems—his *Psychology of Religious Belief* appeared in 1908; with a first-hand acquaintance not merely with numerous occidental varieties of religion but with oriental cults as well—witness his *India and Its Faiths*; and, finally, also with a deep appreciation of the value, the beauty, and the holiness of religion—with the recognition, to quote a sentence from his present volume, that “there is hardly an aspect of our changing life with which religion does not come into touch and which it may not bless and consecrate” (p. 121).²

¹ *The Religious Consciousness: A Psychological Study*. By James Bissett Pratt. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920. ix+488 pages.

² Another passage may be added, since it both presents the author's attitude toward religion and also suggests his conception of it: “When one compares the deeply religious and spiritual person with the best and bravest of those who are not religious, one sees, it must be confessed, that the former possesses something which the others lack. It is not that he is any better morally than his non-religious brother, nor any more appreciative of beauty and love nor any braver. It is, rather, that he has a confidence in the universe and an inner joy which the other does not know. He is, perhaps, no more at home in this world than the other (perhaps he is not so much at home here), but he seems more at home in the universe as a whole. He feels himself in touch, and he acts as if he were in touch, with a larger environment. . . . He

In some quarters the various philosophical disciplines are regarded as parts, or aspects, or extensions of psychology, and such discussions of the more ultimate religious problems as are conceded to be legitimate are therefore assigned to the psychology of religion. Professor Pratt, however, sharply sunders psychological from philosophical tasks. He confines himself to description and analysis in empirical terms, leaving entirely to one side, as outside the province of his inquiry, all questions relating to validity or to metaphysical reality.¹ In his judgment all attempts, such as that recently made by Professor Macintosh, to treat theology as an empirical science are misguided. Our author's empiricism, moreover, is very thoroughgoing. Generalizations and subordination to the fundamental laws of psychology are sought, but no effort is made to bridge over, by speculative constructions, any gaps appearing in religious experience. A degree of fragmentariness is preferred to such continuity and system as can be achieved only through guesswork or imaginative effort.

In distinction from such writers, for example, as Höfding and Stratton, no basic law or principle is championed; no fundamental thesis is defended. In distinction from Ames and King, from Coe, from Durkheim, from Wundt, and from numerous Freudians, no particular "brand" of psychology is permitted to dominate the situation. In this there are items of disadvantage: the facts are knit less closely together, and the relationship between the major topics, and that between religious experience as a whole and other types of experience, are less clear. But there are more than merely compensating gains. There is a wider hospitality toward all sorts of facts and of divergent aspects, and a greater willingness to let facts tell their own story.² Furthermore, the place of intellect in relation to desire, of creed in relation to practice and to cult, of the individual in relation to society, and of religion in relation to science is adjudicated without initial theoretical bias. Hence

has an inner source of joy and strength which does not seem dependent on outer circumstance, and which in fact seems greatest at times when outer sources of strength and promise fail. He is, therefore, able to shed a kind of peace around him which no argument and no mere animal spirits and no mere courage can produce" (pp. 35 f.).

¹ For example, "Whether the mystic in his ecstasy really *knows* any genuine truth or merely seems to himself so to do is not our question" (p. 405).

² Pratt is surely in the right when he maintains that "religion is almost as many-sided and inclusive as life. When we come to this realization, how pitifully narrow and unaccountably blind seem the various attempts that are always being made by enthusiastic and scholarly doctrinaires to deduce the whole of religion from some single human influence" (p. 121)!

the findings seem unusually fair. Though defined as an attitude, religion is said to involve the whole man. While contrasted with "content," as "the relatively passive element in sensation, the accepted and recognized," religion is said always to presuppose an object and to involve some sort of content. "Religion is the serious and social attitude of individuals or communities toward the power or powers which they conceive as having ultimate control over their interests and destinies" (p. 2). Ames's identification of religion with social morality is therefore sharply rejected. Religion, it is insisted, has a conscious concern for ultimate cosmic problems. This concern, according to Pratt, is not with the problems on their own account—herein religion differs from philosophy, theology, and science—but because of their bearings upon practical and personal life. Religion, that is to say, is not a theory but a reality. Nevertheless, it "is a reality which includes a theory. . . . [It] is not satisfied with being simply comforting and "useful"; it means to be also *true*. . . . And if it be said that the *value* of religion at any rate is subjective, then at least religion must not know that this is the case; for if it learned the secret both its value and it would cease to be even subjective" (p. 7). A similar conclusion is reached in the chapter on prayer. "If the subjective value of prayer be all the value it has, we wise psychologists of religion had best keep the fact to ourselves; otherwise the game will soon be up and we shall have no religion left to psychologise about" (p. 336).¹

Unambiguous as Pratt is in his contention that religion is an attitude rather than a mode of knowledge, a life and reality rather than a theory, he nevertheless assigns to cognition a not unimportant rôle. He indeed admits that the dominant feature of working ideas of God is practical; it "is to be found not in what God is conceived to *be* but in what He is relied upon to *do*" (p. 206). Nevertheless, he maintains that it is both bad psychology and bad epistemology to identify God with human attitudes and values, as is done by King and Ames, and thus to overlook

¹ While the author, as mentioned, does not enter upon philosophical issues, a few intimations which he occasionally gives may be of interest: "The psychologist of religion must remember that explanation through the Supernatural, though quite possibly true, is not psychology" (p. 37). "A superhuman source of revelation, though something in which the philosopher may well believe, is not something which the man of science can ever verify" (p. 63). "There is a kind of worship that is perfectly objective and sincere and that is quite as possible for the intelligent man of today as it was for the ancient:—namely that union of awe and gratitude which is reverence, combined perhaps with consecration and a suggestion of communion, which most thoughtful men must feel in the presence of the Cosmic forces and in reflecting upon them" (p. 308).

or explicitly to deny that, to the religious consciousness, God has existence of some sort—that He is not a mere idea but “something genuinely transcendent” (p. 209). Moreover, the influences shaping ideas of God are logical, as well as sociological and psychological. “The development of rational thought, seeking to make its world consistent and to avoid the consciously incongruous, has played a more important rôle than any other one thing in making older ideas of God incredible and in developing new and genuinely vital beliefs” (p. 204).

Independent of a fixed psychological system, and following solely the lead of fact, our author is enabled to recognize the fundamental importance of social factors in the religious experience of individuals while yet repudiating the extreme claims of the Durkheim school. The *form* of religious life, it is maintained, is due to the inborn nature of the individual—to his reason, the precondition of any experience of a human sort, and to various innate tendencies and instincts. The *application* made of these instincts—that is, the *matter* of religious experience—is determined *chiefly* by society. And yet only chiefly. Mr. Ballard and Mr. D’Estrella are evidence that a deaf-mute of average mentality can develop for himself some sort of religious view. If this is so, then

a fortiori can the religious genius, taking the materials which society furnishes, work them over into new forms, put upon them his personal impress, and adding his own intuitions give back to society points of view, concepts, and plans of action which it never had before and which it never would have attained to but for him or for someone like him (p. 73).

The author’s concreteness and psychological catholicity likewise stand him in good stead in his analysis of the typical aspects of religion. These are said to be four: the traditional, reflecting primitive credulity; the rational, based purely on reason and the facts of verifiable experience; the mystical, derived “from a peculiarly subjective experience and one not scientifically verifiable”; the practical or moral, emphasizing what must be done, in distinction from believed or felt.

The highest and healthiest type of faith in the spiritual world, a faith that is warm but without fanaticism, reasonable but not coldly abstract, courageous yet never self-deceived nor disloyal to truth, calmly confident but never blind, and neither slavishly servile to authority nor yet lonely and separatist,—such a faith must draw its strength from all four of the sources (p. 223).

This fourfold division is used also as the framework of the discussion as to why people continue to believe in God (pp. 209–23) and as to the

sources of the belief in immortality (pp. 225-38); to a lesser degree it serves also in the analysis of the absence of belief in immortality (pp. 238-47). The distinction is likewise said to have genetic significance.

The child is characterized almost entirely by traditional religion, the adolescent is an especially good example of the rational and sometimes of the mystical aspects, while in middle life any one of the four aspects may be most prominent, and here the practical or moral element certainly gets its best development (p. 14).

Correspondingly, Pratt emphasizes four temperamental kinds of religion, giving illustrations both personal and institutional. In all of this there seems to be a slight concession to the temptations of schematization. Even so, however, the record of the volume as a whole is in this respect not at all a bad one, though it is to be regretted that the author lost an opportunity to develop the fine analyses suggested by Höffding in his *Philosophy of Religion* (cf. pp. 120-34).

The present volume comprises twenty chapters. The first two define the nature of religion and of the psychology of religion. Immediately following is an admirably lucid account of the rôle played by the subconscious. In the sense of a fringe or background, as also in that of the "physiological" or "unconscious," the subconscious is held to be an extremely significant factor in religion. The latter is described as bound up with the whole psycho-physical organism. "Truly, he who loves God loves Him with all his heart and soul and mind and strength . . . [and] with his body too. Our religion . . . involves our individual, and even our racial, history, it is one aspect of what we are and all we hope to be" (p. 60). A third conception of the subconscious, that of "unconscious psychical states," is dismissed, perhaps altogether too summarily, as unintelligible. A fourth use of the term subconscious identifies it with co-consciousness. The latter is said to be rare in normal individuals and, wherever it occurs in abnormal cases, to give little evidence of superiority. Nevertheless, it is conceded that such dissociated states may at times have special value and that it is only fair to judge them by their fruits. The latter, though most generally bad, have indisputably been the reverse in numbers of conspicuous instances. In the reviewer's judgment, the meanings of the subconscious distinguished and evaluated by Pratt fail to include the "subliminal" as this term is used by James and Starbuck. It is difficult, moreover, to accept the contention that the "great source of the content of the subconscious is . . . the conscious" (p. 63), if the latter term is used as the equivalent of attentive consciousness.

Chapter iv, "Society and the Individual," succeeds well, as has already been intimated, in holding the scales evenly. Unfortunately there is no discussion of Starbuck's and Hocking's theories of central instincts; no attempt is made to enumerate the instincts fundamental to religion, nor is there any elucidation of the way in which the latter develops from the former. It is not criticizing Durkheim, as Pratt supposes, but echoing him to say that the "object toward which the religious man maintains his characteristic attitude is not the historical source of 'the sacred' but rather the hypothetical power which he considers the Determiner of Destiny" (p. 80; see Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, pp. 418, 425).

The two chapters, "The Religion of Childhood" and "Adolescence," refrain from subdividing either childhood or adolescence into sharply demarcated periods, as is so commonly done. As a consequence, the descriptions are in some respects rather more faithful to life in its complexities and varieties; yet there is a serious loss in that definiteness of which most minds stand in need, whether as a preliminary to thorough comprehension or as a basis for action—in this instance, for religious education.

Chapters vii and viii, dealing with conversion, make a valuable distinction between two types of this experience. In the one, there is a more or less clear apprehension of a desired experience, together with an effort to attain it; the search is not for an emotional change but for something far more objective, for a new principle of activity and a new kind of being. Contrasting with this is the conventional conversion "predetermined by an accepted and unquestioned theology"—an emotional drama of three stages (neutral, depressed, elated) without fundamental growth in insight, character, or unification of purpose. James and Starbuck are criticized for overlooking the importance of the distinction between the two types of conversion and for basing their descriptions and building up their norm on the second instead of the first, thus accepting "the conventions of theology as the principles of human nature" (p. 150). The succeeding chapter on "Crowd Psychology and Revivals" presents a conspicuously fine account of revivals in their dependence upon the law of rhythm in human life and upon crowd psychology.

Two chapters, x and xi, discuss the belief, respectively, in God and in immortality. Here too there is so much of the excellent that criticisms dwindle into insignificance. But why is the origin of the belief in a God or gods left "to the anthropologists and the historians, not to mention the theologians, the sociologists, and the philologists" (p. 200)?

Both of the chapters, as well as a later chapter on prayer, repeatedly introduce the results of questionnaires, yet almost as frequently express skepticism with respect to the value of the figures compiled from them. In numerous instances it seems useless, if not indeed positively misleading, to give figures if these are not an index of actual conditions. In passing, the reviewer would remark that the figures and numerous facts emerging from 297 replies to a questionnaire on immortality prepared by him some years ago diverge in numerous respects, which the limits of space prevent him from here indicating, from those of Professor Pratt.

Two chapters are devoted to a study of the causes and functions of cult; in the succeeding chapter an important distinction is made between objective worship, which aims at producing some kind of effect upon the Deity or at communing with Him, and subjective worship, which seeks only "to induce some desired mood or belief or attitude in the mind of the worshipper" (p. 290).

The five last chapters, comprising 123 pages or 30 per cent of the volume, present a lucid and sympathetic account of what is distinguished as a "milder form of mysticism," a description of persons commonly known as "mystics," a detailed and valuable analysis of ecstasy and the mystic life, and an appraisal of mysticism. "It is a dangerous thing to lop off any of one's mental powers or reduce to any extent the mind's moral activity; and so far forth as the ecstatic trance is induced by this kind of mental malpractice it is in a real sense pathological and stands on a par with hypnosis" (p. 386). On the other hand, as the final paragraph of the book re-emphasizes,

every age has need of "the contemplative life," and ours is no exception to the rule. It might, in fact, be maintained that our twentieth century stands in special need of it. . . . The soul . . . needs a chance for spreading its wings, for looking beyond itself, beyond the immediate environment, and for quiet inner growth, which is best to be found in that group of somewhat indefinite but very real experiences—aspiration, insight, contemplation—which may well be called the mystic life (p. 479).

Some may wish that the author had not so lightly committed to other sciences various problems relating to origins; others, that he did not make larger use of genetic description; still others may deplore his failure to appreciate fully the standpoint of those who, like Wundt and Durkheim, believe that religion must ultimately be interpreted in terms of the collective consciousness; and there will be those also who will regard a single brief and incidental paragraph altogether too little to devote to phenomena as significant as prophets and religious leaders.

Many may chide the author for not utilizing the methods and the concepts of the "new psychology" and thus attempting explanation as well as bare description and analysis. No one, however, can give careful study to the volume without realizing that, within the limits it sets itself, it offers a rarely judicious treatment of the more fundamental aspects of the religious life and that, in addition, it presents not a few contributions of permanent value.

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A JEWISH VIEW OF JESUS¹

Dr. Enelow, one of the rabbis of Emanuel Temple, New York City, has made a notable addition to a small class of comparatively recent books by distinguished Jewish authors contributing to the better understanding of Jesus. It ought to be expected that light would come from the long line of devout scholars, kinsmen of the great prophets of Israel and modernized heirs of the Jewish thought-world in which Jesus lived and taught.

The spirit of the author is finely expressed in the words from the closing paragraph:

Who can compute all that Jesus has meant to humanity? The love he has inspired, the solace he has given, the good he has engendered, the hope and joy he has kindled—all that is unequalled in human history.

Yet the author feels that of course no Jew could accept the divinity of Jesus; neither does he find in Jesus any realization of the ideas associated in the Jewish mind with the Messiah. The Jewish idea of the messianic age is "a period of human perfection and peace." "Such a period not only failed to commence with Jesus but to this day it has not come."

One of the best points in the book is its repeated emphasis of the "personal element" in Jesus' teaching. Most Jewish teachers "from the prophets down" "were interested in principles, in doctrines, in ideals," while Jesus spoke from the standpoint of his own religious experience. While Moses spoke of the "God of your fathers", Jesus always spoke of "his own God, his own Father." "The prophets were friends of the poor," "Jesus not only championed the poor, he lived their life; he not only pitied sinners but mingled with them."

In a book of this size the author naturally could not indicate the extent to which he had based his conclusions on an intensive critical

¹ *A Jewish View of Jesus*. By H. G. Enelow. New York: Macmillan, 1920. 181 pages.